

This Report will be made public on 18 January 2022



Report Number **C/21/72**

To: Cabinet
Date: 26th January 2022
Status: Non Key Decision
Director: Charlotte Spendley, Director – Corporate Services
Cabinet Member: Councillor Jennifer Hollingsbee – Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Communities

SUBJECT: EQUALITY & DIVERSITY ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

SUMMARY: The Equality Act 2010 places a statutory duty on the council to prepare and publish information annually to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty. The draft Equality & Diversity Annual Report is therefore presented for consideration and approval prior to publication.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The council needs to ensure that it meets the statutory requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty. The report demonstrates the council's commitment to positively contributing to the advancement of equality and good relations, summarises the activities undertaken in 2020-21 to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion, and highlights the positive measures that have been taken to remove barriers, improve access to services, and increase customer satisfaction.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report C/21/72.
2. To consider and approve the draft Equality & Diversity Annual Report outlined in Appendix 1.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Equality Act 2010 created a Public Sector Equality Duty. In essence, this duty requires public authorities to consider how they could positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. It requires equality considerations to be taken into account when making decisions and reflected in the design of policies and the delivery of services. While compliance is a legal obligation, the duty should be viewed as beneficial for organisations; the aims of better informed public sector decision-making and policy development should lead to services that effectively and appropriately meet diverse user needs and to increased customer satisfaction.
- 1.2 The Public Sector Equality Duty is made up of a general equality duty, which is the overarching requirement of the Public Sector Equality Duty, and 'specific duties', which are designed to ensure public authorities meet the general equality duty.
- 1.3 The general equality duty came into force in April 2011 and states that in the exercise of their functions a public authority must have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristic and those who do not; and
 - Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

Having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people; and
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

Having due regard for fostering good relations involves tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

The Act states that compliance with the equality duty may involve treating some people more favourably than others.

- 1.4 The Public Sector Equality Duty covers the nine protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act, which are:
 - Age
 - Disability
 - Gender Reassignment
 - Pregnancy and Maternity
 - Race

- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership¹.

2. THE ANNUAL EQUALITY & DIVERSITY REPORT

2.1 The 'specific duties' outline a statutory requirement for public authorities to publish information annually to demonstrate compliance with the general equality duty (outlined in paragraph 1.3).

2.2 The current publication is over 12 months old so an updated version is now required.

2.3 This annual report has therefore been updated in order to demonstrate the council's compliance with the general Public Sector Equality Duty and commitment to its principles. The report:

- Provides a range of demographic and socio-economic information. This can be used to understand more about the needs of our local communities and those that may be affected by council services, policies and practices and in order to inform decision-making and policy development.
- Demonstrates how the council has engaged with the community, taken actions to enable better understanding of different customer needs and ways to support them, and considered potential equality and diversity implications prior to making decisions.
- Outlines the activities the council has undertaken over the past year to promote equality, diversity and inclusion amongst its workforce, Members and within the community, and the positive measures that have been taken to remove barriers, improve access to services and increase customer satisfaction.

2.4 The 'specific duties' also outline the requirement for the council to prepare and publish equality objectives that it thinks it should achieve in order to meet the general equality duty every four years. These equality objectives are outlined in the council's current Equality and Diversity Policy (2021-25) and reproduced in section 6 of the Equality & Diversity Annual Report (Appendix 1).

2.5 Once considered and approved by Cabinet, the Equality and Diversity Annual Report will be published on the Equality and Diversity page of the council's website.

3. IMPACT ON CORPORATE STRATEGY AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

¹ Only the first aim of the general equality duty applies to this characteristic, meaning that public authorities need to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination against someone because of their marriage or civil partnership status in the workplace. The other aims (advancing equality and fostering good relations) do not apply.

- 3.1 A number of actions have taken place in 2020-21 in support of the delivery of the Corporate Plan and these are highlighted in the annual report (Appendix 1). The council has a number of strategies, policies and strategic projects in place to meet the current and anticipated needs of a diverse district and will continue to use this type of information to inform service design, policy development and future decision-making.
- 3.2 The report highlights activities that have taken place in 2020-21 to support different customer needs, to promote equality, diversity and inclusion, and the positive measures that have taken place to remove barriers, improve access to services and increase customer satisfaction. Areas of note include:
- The launch of the Council's new housing service on 1st October 2020 with a vision of putting tenants at the very heart of the service. The housing team have worked during the first six-months to improve tenant engagement through conducting a tenant and leaseholder satisfaction survey to develop an action plan for improvement; working with the Tenant and Leaseholder Board, TPAS (tenant engagement specialists), and tenants, to create a Tenant Engagement Strategy and introducing a variety of tenant communications, including the establishment of a bi-annual tenant newsletter, and harnessing bulk email and text messaging systems to keep tenants informed.
 - The successful retention of the Customer Service Excellence accreditation and being awarded with three additional compliance pluses following assessment in September 2020. The additional compliance pluses were awarded for the following: the work undertaken by the Welfare Team to support customers during the Covid crisis; the adaptation of policies and procedures (and the development of new ones where needed) to make sure customer needs were properly identified; and making sure that all customers knew how to access services during lockdown.
 - Following the creation of a dedicated Welfare Team within the council in 2019 to support customers and signpost them appropriately, the team have undertaken further training during the year with the National Autistic Society. All members of the team have also become Armed Forces Champions and use analytical software to identify people potentially eligible for pension credits, discretionary housing payments and financial support payments for their council tax to help them claim these benefits.
 - The Council won a Silver Award in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme during the year, and the council submitted a further application for a Gold Award in March 2021, which has since been successful. This means that the council is now recognised with the highest award for its role in employing and supporting persons who serve and protect our country.
 - Working in partnership with Kent Coast Volunteering, the council successfully bid for £70,000 of grant funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust and alongside funding from Kent County Council's Combined Members' grant and the district council's own Member Ward Grant funding to establish a new community centre in Cheriton for Ghurka veterans and other members of the local community.

- We have continued to support charities, voluntary and community groups through awarding 154 Ward Grants, provided over £50,000 of funding for community projects through our Local Children’s Partnership Group, and awarded Grant Agreements to organisations that support vulnerable residents and health and wellbeing across the district, including Folkestone Sports Centre Trust and the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Following the Council’s swift establishment of three community hubs within the district in response to the coronavirus pandemic, the council committed to an additional £35,000 of funding to support the hub model in 2020/21 to provide a range of essential services needed to ensure the health and wellbeing of residents, particularly the most vulnerable. This collaborative effort between the council, volunteers, and charitable organisations has been recognised as an initiative of national importance, with the council receiving a Certificate of Excellence award from iESE, a national not-for-profit social enterprise to transform public services, in March 2021. The Folkestone & Hythe Community Safety Partnership have continued to deliver a range of Police and Crime Commissioner-funded projects during the year to vulnerable and diverse communities across the district. Projects have included working with Urban Pastors to tackle anti-social behaviour, Aspire to support homeless individuals and Kent Police on initiatives to help tackle knife crime within the community.
- The Folkestone Community Works Programme has continued to address issues faced by the most vulnerable in the district by funding projects that are working to improve access to services and opportunities for businesses and residents within the Central and East Folkestone wards. During the year, council-funded projects have provided professional support for residents who decided their route to economic independence was through self-employment, or had a need to supplement their income by creating a ‘table top’ businesses by using a skill or hobby to generate additional income.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

4.1

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
Failure to fulfil statutory obligations imposed by Public Sector Equality Duty	High	Low	Preparation and publication of Equality & Diversity Annual Report

5. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

5.1 Legal Officer’s Comments (NM)

Legal implications and the council’s statutory obligations are set out in the body of the report.

5.2 Finance Officer’s Comments (LW)

There are no direct financial implications associated with the report

5.3 Human Resources (RB)

There are no direct Human Resource implications emanating from this report.

5.4 Diversities and Equalities Implications (GE)

The report provides information that may support informed decision making, outlines the council's achievements in advancing equality in 2020-21, and fulfils the council's statutory obligations.

5.5 Communications (JW)

Many of the very positive aspects of the Equality and Diversity report have already been communicated externally. There is, however, a refreshed positive impact to be gained by listing all the elements together whilst communicating the report's publication.

5.6 Climate Change (AT)

No direct impacts arising from the publication of this report (Appendix 1), as the report is a factual update on activity over the last monitoring year (2020/21). However, several of the projects detailed in the report have the potential to impact positively on climate change considerations and funding for the community hubs and Citizens Advice Bureau which have the potential to address matters of fuel poverty.

6. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting:

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Performance and Improvement Specialist

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Draft Equality & Diversity Annual Report 2020-21